EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) propose improvements to the Interstate 25 (I-25) Corridor from just south of United States Highway 50 (US 50)/State Highway (SH) 47 (milepost 101) to just south of Pueblo Boulevard (milepost 94) in Pueblo, Colorado, a distance of approximately 7 miles. The project area is shown in **Exhibit ES-1** and **Exhibit ES-2**. I-25 through the City of Pueblo (City) is an aging facility that was constructed between 1949 and 1959. The highway engineers at that time designed the freeway to serve transportation needs through the year 1975.

I-25 serves as a critical north-south link in the nation's Interstate Highway System and as a strategic international corridor under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The segment of I-25 that passes through Pueblo serves interstate travel, regional travel, local trips (trips with origins and destinations within Pueblo), and freight traffic.

A study of I-25 through Pueblo was initiated in 2000 by FHWA and CDOT. The study process analyzed transportation conditions and identified transportation needs in the corridor. Through an active public participation program, community values were captured in a Community Vision statement (see **Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need**) that asks FHWA and CDOT to respect the traditions and trends of the Pueblo community as they develop solutions to roadway problems. The culmination of this effort is called the New Pueblo Freeway project.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that projects that receive federal funding and may have an environmental impact be analyzed through a rigorous process that allows the public to review and comment on the project. Federal agencies are required by NEPA to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for major federal projects that have the potential to significantly affect the quality of the human and natural environment. The Draft EIS (DEIS) was published in December 2011. This Final EIS (FEIS) is a joint effort between CDOT and FHWA.

The intent of the New Pueblo Freeway EIS is to identify highway improvements along I-25 through Pueblo and to comply with the policies and procedures under NEPA. Specifically, this FEIS:

- Analyzes alternatives that meet the project Purpose and Need;
- Details the process through which highway improvement alternatives were developed;
- Discloses foreseeable social, economic, and natural environmental impacts resulting from the project;
- Provides findings for public review;
- Outlines mitigation measures to minimize project impacts; and
- Addresses comments received on the DEIS.

The Modified I-25 Alternative has been identified as the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS.

This FEIS is available for review and comment by interested parties, including state and federal agencies, citizens, and elected officials. During the FEIS review period (30 days), a public hearing will be held and comments will be recorded.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the New Pueblo Freeway project is to: 1) improve safety by addressing deteriorating roadways and bridges and non-standard road characteristics on I-25; and 2) improve local and regional mobility within and through the City to meet existing and future travel demands. The need for the project results from the highway's age and the design practices at the time it was built, which have led to the following issues:

- **Safety problems:** I-25 through Pueblo has high accident rates that exceed state averages, areas where shoulders are too narrow to safely accommodate a broken-down vehicle, on and off ramps with inadequate lengths to maneuver vehicles, and inadequate spacing of interchanges for drivers to safely merge into highway traffic.
- **Mobility problems:** I-25 through Pueblo has interchanges that do not connect to appropriate city streets (e.g., connect to local neighborhood streets instead of major cross streets), a lack of alternative routes for north-south and east-west connectivity, areas of reduced speed, insufficient capacity for projected traffic forecasts and poor levels of service, aging bridges with inadequate bridge sufficiency ratings, and conflicts with local and regional travel.

EXHIBIT ES-1
Project Vicinity Map

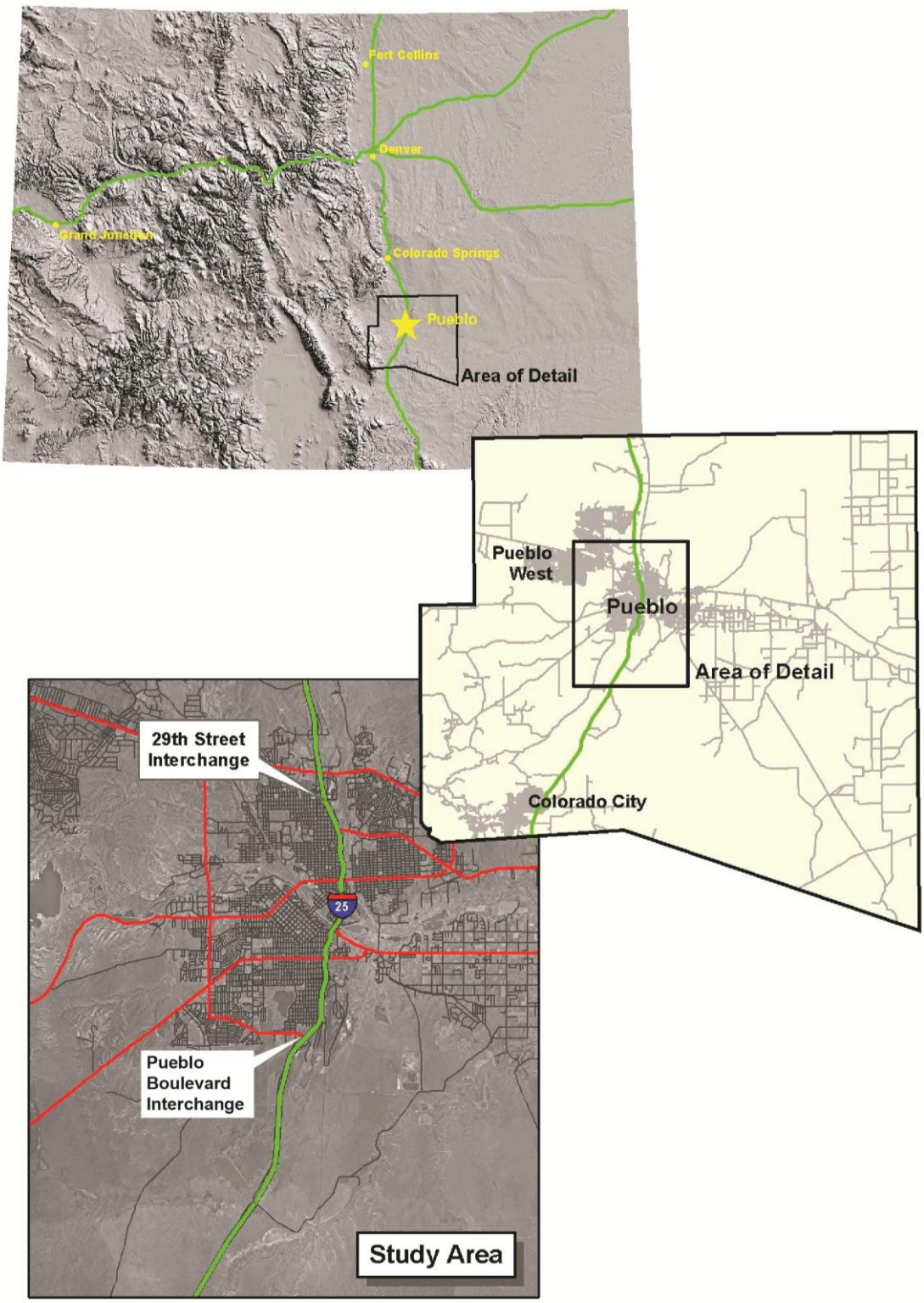
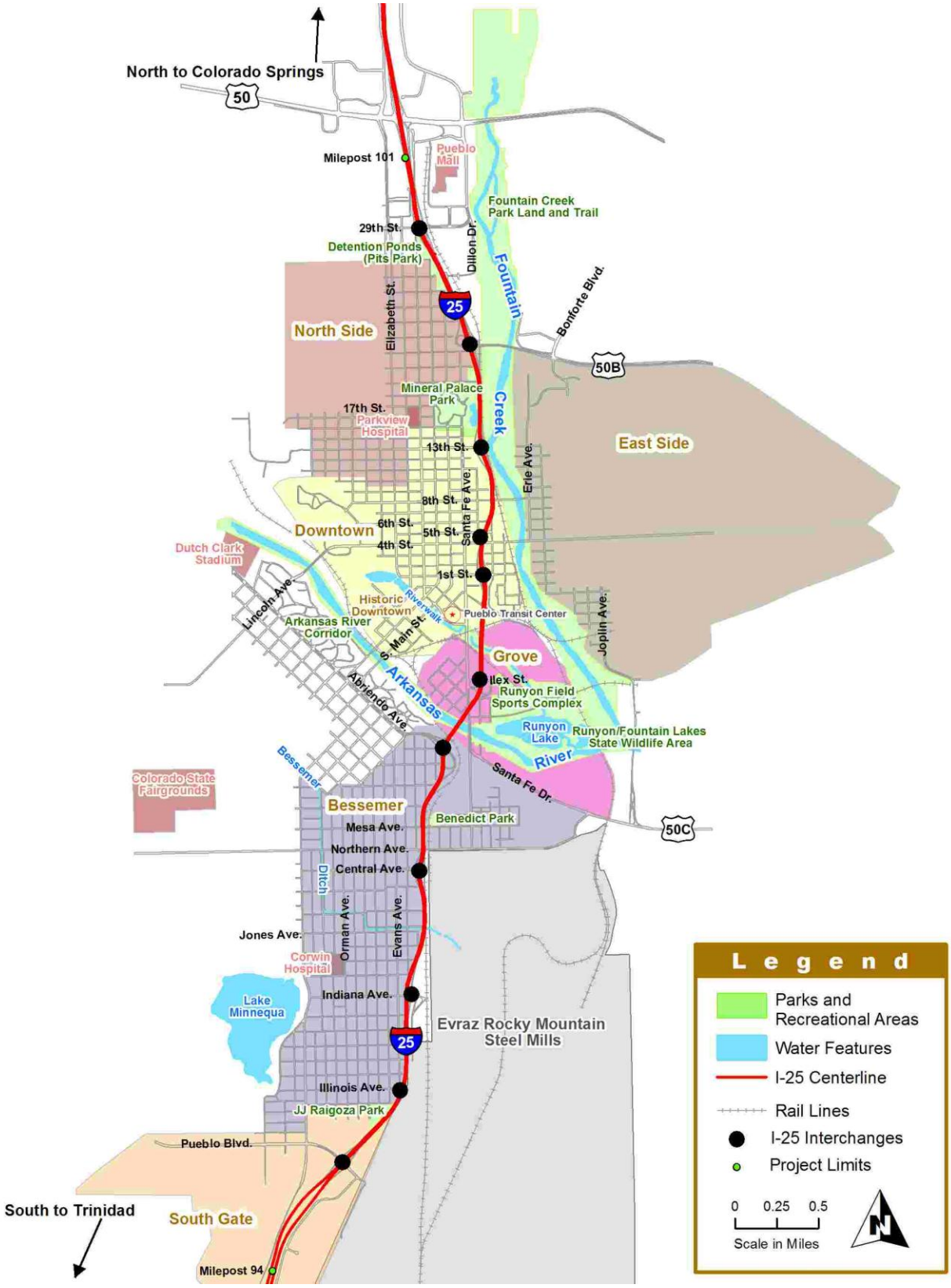


EXHIBIT ES-2
Project Study Area



ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

CDOT recognized that the decision for improvements to I-25 through Pueblo would require a multi-disciplinary approach to developing alternatives that would involve a team of transportation and highway design professionals/engineers, environmental managers, public involvement specialists, and a wide range of community stakeholders with an interest in the outcome of the project. To implement this approach, representatives from FHWA and CDOT joined a consultant team of professionals in a variety of disciplines to form the CDOT Project Team. These members are listed in **Chapter 7 – List of Preparers**. The CDOT Project Team followed the guidelines of the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) *Report 480, A Guide to Best Practices for Achieving Context Sensitive Solutions*, for studying improvements to I-25 through Pueblo (NCHRP, 2002). Using the process outlined in the Context Sensitive Solutions guidelines resulted in a Community Vision and transportation solutions that meet the Purpose and Need for the project, are sensitive to environmental and community resources, and reflect community values.

Developed through public participation, the Community Vision statement is an important element of the alternatives development process. Similar to the project's Purpose and Need, it summarizes the community's desire for a New Pueblo Freeway project that balances the needs of interstate, regional, and local trips; provides a safe, intuitive highway facility; and re-establishes east-west access through Pueblo. The Community Vision Statement, while not used for alternatives screening, was used to assist in the design of project alternatives. Further discussion of the Community Vision is presented in **Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need**.

To ensure a comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of possible solutions, the CDOT Project Team used three levels of evaluation and screening: Evaluation and Screening of Ideas, Evaluation and Screening of Concepts, and Evaluation and Screening of Strategies. Guided by the Purpose and Need and the Community Vision, the CDOT Project Team and stakeholders developed criteria for evaluating project alternatives. The evaluation criteria were classified by four categories, which are described in more detail in **Chapter 2 – Alternatives**:

- Community Values
- Environmental Resources
- Mobility and Safety
- Implementation

The solutions were assessed against the evaluation criteria developed for that step to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each solution. Solutions not meeting the Purpose and Need were either modified and taken to the next step of evaluation or discontinued from further evaluation.

Ideas that met the Purpose and Need were developed into concepts in the following categories:

- Bypasses around Pueblo
- Alternative Routes through Pueblo
- Transit (ability to implement public transit instead of highway alternatives)
- I-25 Improvement Concepts

Some ideas that were classified as Transportation System Management (TSM) and Travel Demand Management (TDM) alone did not meet the project Purpose and Need; however, they were included as enhancements to the Build Alternatives because they slightly improve local mobility at the location specified although they do not address corridor-

TDM *– Travel Demand Management is the art of influencing travel behavior for the purpose of reducing or redistributing travel demand. The primary purpose of TDM is to reduce the number of vehicles at a time using highway facilities while providing a wide variety of mobility options for those who wish to travel. Some examples of TDM include telecommuting, ridesharing, and alternative (flex) work schedules.*

TSM *– Transportation System Management is the improvement of vehicular flow by implementing low-cost measures that increase the efficiency of the existing road and avoid the need for major roadway expansion. There are four categories of improvements: 1) improve the efficiency of an existing highway network; 2) reduce vehicle use in congested areas; 3) improve transit services; and 4) improve internal transit management efficiency. TSM ideas include better signal synchronization. TSM improvements include Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), which use various technologies in an integrated fashion to improve the safety, efficiency, productivity, inter-modal connectivity, and inter-jurisdictional coordination of the roadway by managing traffic and incidents and providing traveler information. Examples of ITS include ramp meters, traffic cameras, and variable message signs.*

wide capacity needs.

Similar to screening of ideas, the concepts were evaluated using criteria developed from the Community Vision and screened using the Purpose and Need. Concepts were ranked by how well they met the Purpose and Need and evaluation criteria and were then packaged into six strategies (see **Exhibit 2-16**) that were further screened based on the project Purpose and Need.

Except for one build strategy, all strategies were eliminated from further study because they failed to meet the Purpose and Need. The results of this analysis led to the selection of Alternative Strategy 6: Improve I-25 with six lanes and provide a Low-Speed Loop. This strategy underwent further refinement by the CDOT Project Team and stakeholders and became one of the final Build Alternatives, referred to as the "Existing I-25 Alternative." The No Action Alternative was also retained because is required by law and it serves as a baseline for comparison to the Build Alternatives.

Development of a second build alternative evolved from the Existing I-25 Alternative while the CDOT Project Team and stakeholders were in the process of conducting the analyses for alternative interchanges. This "new" build alternative, named the "Modified I-25 Alternative," is similar to the Existing I-25 Alternative; however, in the Central Area (Phase 2), between Ilex Street and Indiana Avenue, the highway would move to a new alignment east of the current I-25. The Modified I-25 Alternative would result in not having to move the railroad adjacent to the Evraz Rocky Mountain Steel Mills and would have fewer impacts to the Bessemer Neighborhood. The Modified I-25 Alternative is identified as the Preferred Alternative.

The following final alternatives were moved forward for detailed evaluation in the FEIS:

- No Action Alternative
- Existing I-25 Alternative
- Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative)

The alternative development process is outlined in **Exhibit ES-3**.

No Action Alternative

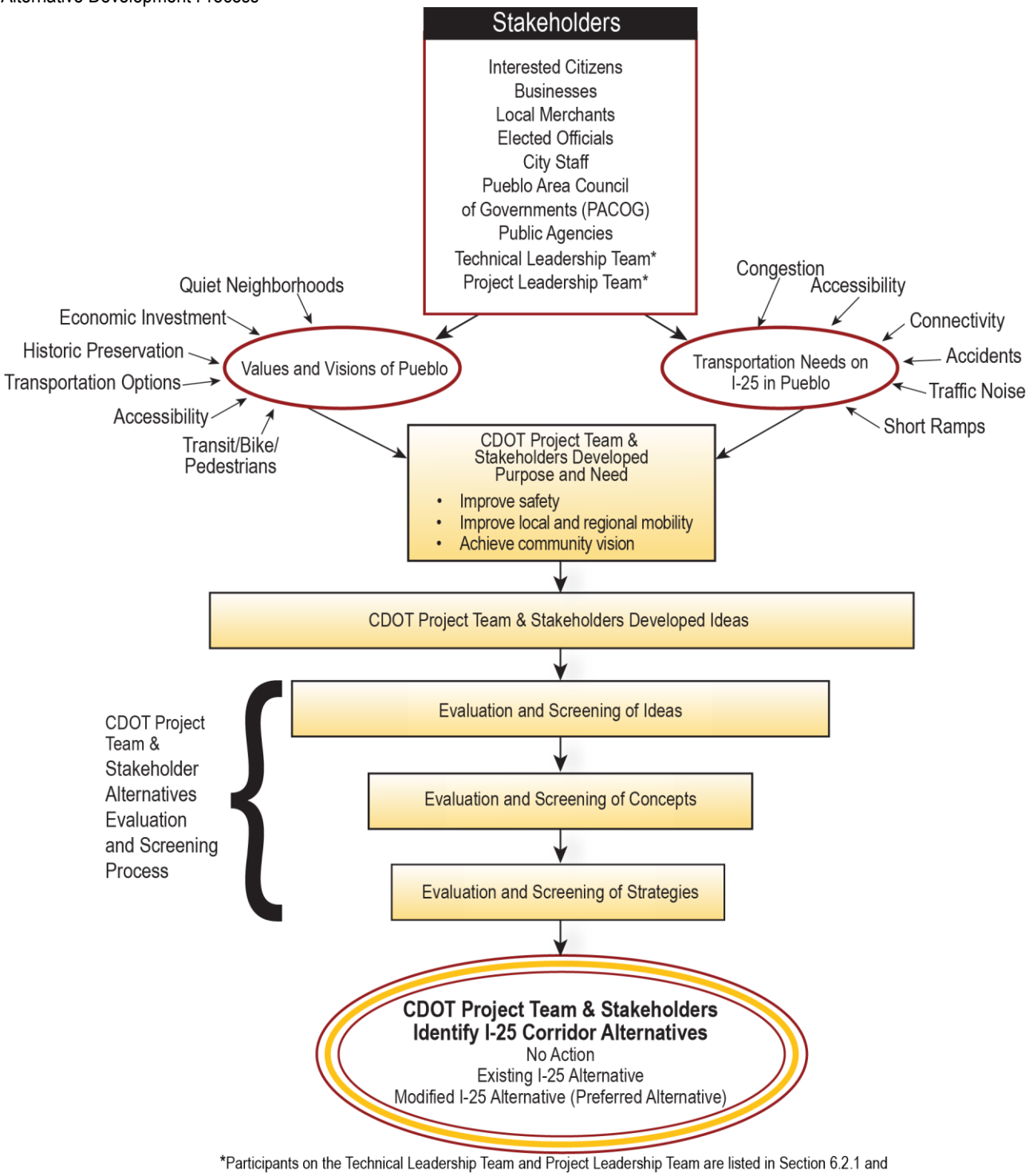
A No Action Alternative is required under NEPA to compare against the action, or Build Alternatives. The No Action Alternative does not include any corridor-wide safety and local or regional mobility improvements beyond routine maintenance such as pavement overlays and restriping of the existing facility, as defined in the Pueblo Area Council of Government's (PACOG) financially constrained *Pueblo Area 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan* (PACOG, 2008), and eventually the replacement of deficient structures. As with the Build Alternatives, the No Action Alternative has undergone a thorough analysis to measure how well it meets the Purpose and Need and evaluation criteria for the New Pueblo Freeway. Analysis of the No Action Alternative enables decision-makers to compare the magnitude of the environmental effects of each of the Build Alternatives with the effects of not making any improvements to I-25 through Pueblo. The roadway, interchange, network, bicycle, and pedestrian features of the No Action Alternative are described and illustrated in **Exhibit ES-4**.

Existing I-25 Alternative

The Existing I-25 Alternative was the result of modifications and refinements to the strategy that would widen I-25 to six lanes through much of the project area. The alternative was developed by the CDOT Project Team and stakeholders during the alternative interchange analysis task. The roadway, interchange, network, bicycle, and pedestrian features of the Existing I-25 Alternative are described and illustrated in **Exhibit ES-5**.

To meet projected capacity needs, the Existing I-25 Alternative would widen I-25 to six lanes (three in each direction) from just north of 29th Street to Indiana Avenue and maintain four lanes (two in each direction) from Indiana Avenue to Pueblo Boulevard on its current alignment. The DEIS presented the Existing I-25 Alternative with six lanes throughout the entire corridor; the Existing I-25 Alternative was revised to include a four-lane section south of Indiana Avenue to minimize project impacts in this area as a result of comments received from the public on the DEIS. As described in **Exhibit ES-5**, the Existing I-25 Alternative reconstructs the interchanges at US 50B, Indiana Avenue, and Pueblo Boulevard; provides access to 29th Street via a frontage road; and creates split-diamond interchanges between 13th Street and 1st Street and Abriendo Avenue and Northern Avenue.

EXHIBIT ES-3
Alternative Development Process



*Participants on the Technical Leadership Team and Project Leadership Team are listed in Section 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 of the Comments and Coordination Chapter.

EXHIBIT ES-4
No Action Alternative

I-25 Roadway Features
- 4 existing lanes, 2 in each direction
- Routine maintenance (pavement overlays, striping)

Interchange Features
- No improvements to interchanges

Network Features
- No improvements to network features

Bicycle and Pedestrian Features
- No bicycle or pedestrian improvements

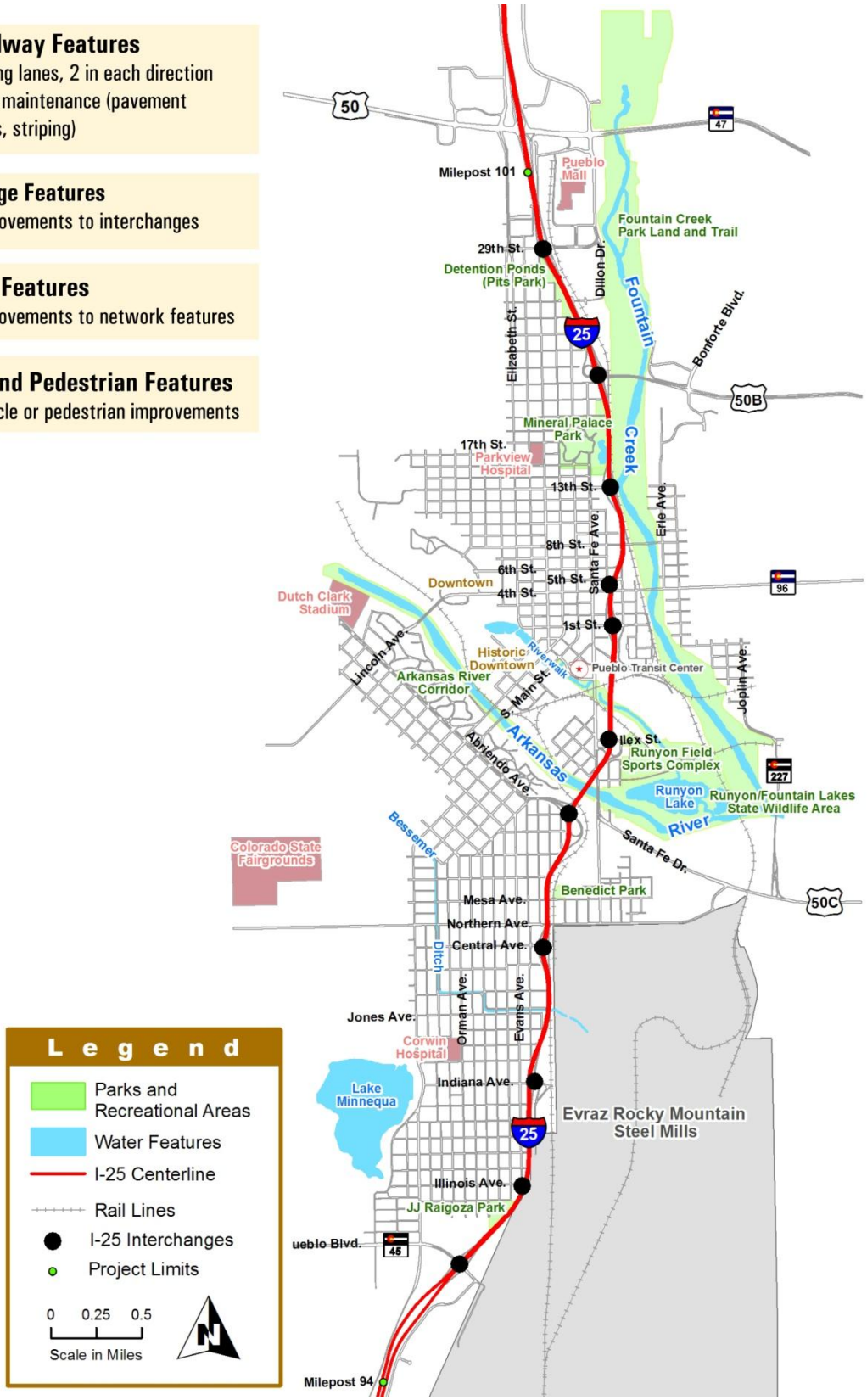


EXHIBIT ES-5
Existing I-25 Alternative

I-25 Roadway Features

Six lanes (three in each direction) just north of 29th Street to Indiana Avenue

Standard shoulders and acceleration/ deceleration lanes

1. Straighten I-25 through downtown
2. Relocate Union Pacific Railroad

Interchange Features

3. Diamond interchange at US 50B with one-way frontage roads to 29th Street
4. Split-diamond interchange between 13th Street and 1st Street with one-way frontage roads between ramps; additional southbound and northbound exit ramps near 6th Street
5. Split-diamond interchange between Abriendo Avenue and Northern Avenue with one-way frontage roads connecting the ramps
6. Single-point diamond interchange at Indiana Avenue
7. Partial cloverleaf interchange at Pueblo Boulevard

Network Features

8. Extend Dillon Drive south from 26th Street to US 50B
9. Connect Abriendo Avenue and Santa Fe Drive (US 50C)

Bicycle and Pedestrian Features

10. Build sidewalks along Dillon Drive extension and US 50B bridge
11. Expand sidewalks on the Mesa Avenue overpass to connect Benedict Park to the west side of I-25
12. Build trail from just north of US 50B bridge to Mineral Palace Park
13. Construct a bike/pedestrian bridge between Mineral Palace Park and the Fountain Creek Trail
14. Build trail between Runyon Field and J.J. Raigoza Park

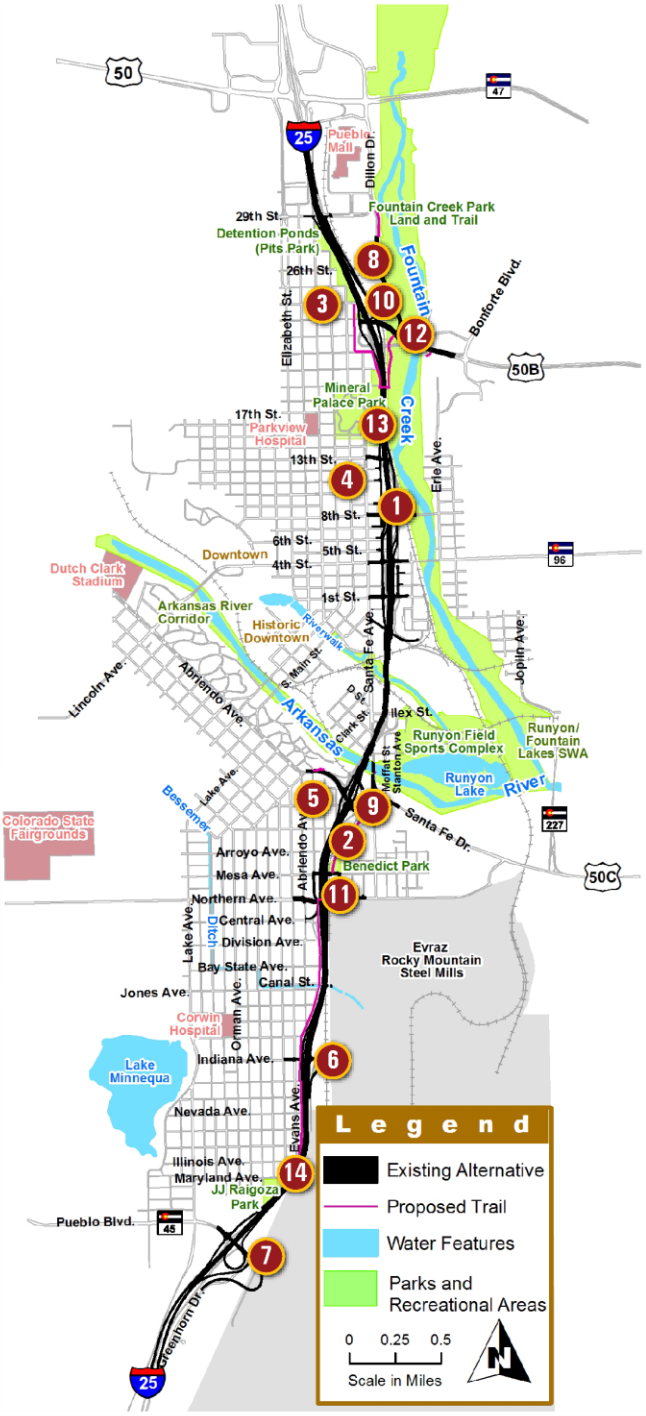
Other Features

Accommodates Circulator Bus System

Transportation Systems Management (TSM)

Travel Demand Management (TDM) (By Others)

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)



*Detailed maps of the Existing I-25 Alternative are available in Appendix E.

The Existing I-25 Alternative would improve connectivity off of I-25 by extending Dillon Drive south from 26th Street to US 50B. It would also extend Abriendo Avenue across I-25 to Santa Fe Drive. This connection would provide improved access between the neighborhoods west and east of I-25.

Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative)

The Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) was developed by the CDOT Project Team and stakeholders from the Existing I-25 Alternative. It shares the design characteristics of the Existing I-25 Alternative, with the exception of one area of the corridor, which is described in the next paragraph. The roadway, interchange, network, bicycle, and pedestrian features of the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) are illustrated and described in **Exhibit ES-6**.

In the central part of the corridor between the Arkansas River and Canal Street, the Existing I-25 Alternative can be implemented only by moving the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) tracks 150 feet to the east to make room for widening I-25. Difficulties associated with moving the rail line led to the idea of relocating I-25 to a new alignment to the east at approximately Ilex Street. Moving I-25 to the new alignment in this area would allow the UPRR rail line south of the Arkansas River to remain in place. At approximately Minnequa Avenue I-25 would bridge over the railroad tracks and then run on the west side of the tracks and rejoin the existing I-25 alignment just south of Indiana Avenue. The Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) was found to have unexpected benefits in the southern end of the corridor. By straightening I-25 at Ilex Street, I-25 would leave the current alignment and continue south. The roadway portion no longer used as I-25 would be available to become an extension of Santa Fe Avenue. This extension is a critical element to improving local mobility that is not possible under the Existing I-25 Alternative.

The Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) would extend Abriendo Avenue across I-25 to Santa Fe Drive. This connection would provide improved access between the neighborhoods west and east of I-25.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations for the Build Alternatives

The Community Vision for the New Pueblo Freeway charges the CDOT Project Team with finding a multi-modal and forward-looking solution. Extensive bicycle and pedestrian facilities are planned as a part of both Build Alternatives.

A consistent concern heard from the citizens of Pueblo was that I-25 acts as a barrier between neighborhoods, particularly for bicycles and pedestrians. Parks and open spaces are on the opposite side of the highway and are accessible only by car. Trails were discussed extensively during the neighborhood meetings to refine the Build Alternatives, and participants actively expressed the need for trails and sidewalks to reconnect neighborhoods, parks, and businesses.

Under both Build Alternatives, the completion of proposed trails and sidewalks would provide continuous bicycle and pedestrian access between 29th Street in the north to Pueblo Boulevard in the south. Residents would be able to access trails near their homes that would give families safe, non-motorized access to Mineral Palace Park, Benedict Park, JJ Raigoza Park, the Historic Arkansas Riverwalk of Pueblo, the Runyon Field Sports Complex, the Runyon Lake State Wildlife Area, and the Fountain Creek Trail system.

Identification of a Preferred Alternative

FHWA and CDOT have identified the Modified I-25 Alternative as the Preferred Alternative for improvements to I-25 through Pueblo because it better addresses the local and regional mobility problems identified in the project Purpose and Need by providing additional north-south mobility with the extension of Santa Fe Drive and Stanton Avenue. This opportunity is not available with the No Action Alternative or the Existing I-25 Alternative. Additional discussion on the identification of the Preferred Alternative can be found in **Section 2.7 Identification of a Preferred Alternative**. There is very little difference between the Existing I-25 Alternative and the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) in terms of environmental impacts and cost. A comparison of impacts resulting from the No Action Alternative and the Build Alternatives is presented in **Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**. Although the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) impacts 0.88 acre more wetlands than the Existing I-25 Alternative, mitigation will replace the functional values of these wetlands on an equal basis.

EXHIBIT ES-6
Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative)

I-25 Roadway Features

Six lanes (three in each direction) just north of 29th Street to Indiana Avenue

Standard shoulders and acceleration/deceleration lanes

1. Straighten I-25 through downtown
2. Relocate I-25 to the east between Abriendo Avenue to Indiana Avenue to eliminate relocation of the Union Pacific Railroad

Interchange Features

3. Diamond interchange at US 50B with one-way frontage roads to 29th Street
4. Split-diamond interchange between 13th Street and 1st Street with one-way frontage roads between ramps; additional southbound and northbound exit ramps near 6th Street
5. Split-diamond interchange between Abriendo and Northern Avenues with one-way frontage roads connecting the ramps
6. Single-point diamond interchange at Indiana Avenue
7. Partial cloverleaf interchange at Pueblo Boulevard

Network Features

8. Extend Dillon Drive south from 26th Street to US 50B
9. Connect Abriendo Avenue and Santa Fe Drive (US 50C)
10. Extend Santa Fe Avenue from Ilex Street to Minnequa Avenue
11. Rebuild Stanton Avenue south over the Arkansas River, intersect with Santa Fe Drive and connect to Santa Fe Avenue

Bicycle and Pedestrian Features

12. Build sidewalks along Dillon Drive extension and US 50B bridge
13. Expand sidewalks on the Mesa Avenue overpass to connect Benedict Park to the west side of I-25
14. Build sidewalks along Stanton Avenue to connect to the HARP trail and Benedict Park
15. Build trail from just north of US 50B bridge to Mineral Palace Park
16. Construct a bike/pedestrian bridge between Mineral Palace Park and the Fountain Creek trail
17. Build trail between Runyon Field and J.J. Raigoza park

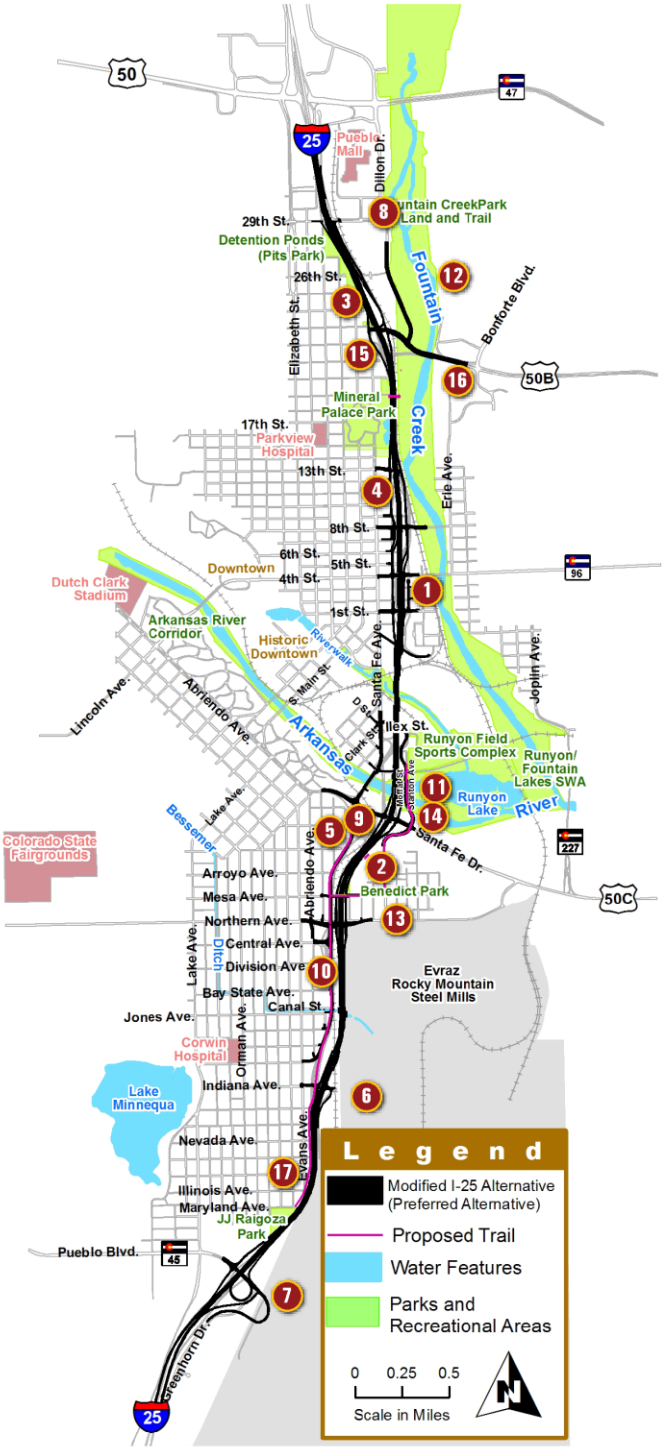
Other Features

Accommodates Circulator Bus System

Transportation Systems Management (TSM)

Travel Demand Management (TDM) (By Others)

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)



*Detailed maps of the Modified I-25 Alternative are available in AppendixE.

In December 2010, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concurred that the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) is the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA) for detailed evaluation. A copy of this concurrence letter can be found in **Appendix B**. The Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative), with the proposed mitigation, would also result in the least overall harm to properties that are protected under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act, as described in **Chapter 4 – Section 4(f) Evaluation**. The CDOT Project Team used an extensive public involvement approach during the development of each alternative, as discussed above and in **Chapter 6 – Comments and Coordination**. In 2013, the City Council of Pueblo, PACOG, and the Pueblo County Commissioners each expressed support and preference for the Modified I-25 Alternative as the Preferred Alternative in formal resolutions, which can be found in **Appendix B**.

Phasing and Funding

Construction phases typically are determined during the final design when additional detail is available. However, for major transportation projects, physical and funding limitations associated with constructing the entire project at one time—including phasing and fiscal constraints—need to be identified and disclosed during the NEPA process and prior to approval of the Record of Decision (ROD).

The Preferred Alternative is estimated to cost approximately $760.5 million (based on preliminary design estimates in 2010 dollars)—including design, right-of-way (ROW) acquisition, mitigation, and construction— which is more than what is currently available in the PACOG Fiscally Constrained Plan in the *Pueblo Area 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan* (PACOG, 2008). Because FHWA can approve in a ROD only those project improvements that are included in the Fiscally Constrained Plan, a phased approach is necessary. As stated in 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 771.111(f), project phases must connect logical termini and be of sufficient length to address environmental matters on a broad scope, have independent utility in that they would be a usable and a reasonable expenditure even if no additional transportation improvements in the area are made, and should not restrict the consideration of alternatives for other reasonably foreseeable transportation improvements. Using this approach, which allows for disclosure and discussion of project phasing during the NEPA process, additional detail is provided regarding phasing as an enhancement to the typical NEPA process. Each additional phase of the project will need to be included in the 20-year Fiscally Constrained Plan as additional project phases are funded, with at least a portion placed in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Project improvements will be funded by CDOT and FHWA. Other opportunities for joint funding with local agencies and for federal grants and loans will be considered as available and as appropriate. This process, including the preparation of a ROD for each project phase along with the opportunity for the public to comment, will be repeated until construction of the entire Preferred Alternative identified in the FEIS is completed. Implementation of future phases may not occur if funding beyond the initial phase cannot be identified.

After the FEIS has been made available to the public and the review period concludes, FHWA and CDOT will decide whether to select an initial phase for the first ROD. Subsequent RODs will take into consideration the FEIS, the preceding RODs, and any environmental reevaluations that may have been performed. To accommodate the funding limitations described above, the Preferred Alternative has been divided into two phases: Phase 1 and Phase 2. In selecting project phases, care was taken to ensure that each phase demonstrates independent utility; that is, it can be constructed and function independently without other phases or improvements.

Phase 1, which consists of improvements planned from approximately the Ilex interchange north to 29th Street, would cost between approximately $300 and $315 million (2010 dollars) and could be constructed as smaller, individual packages within these project limits. Phase 1 is proposed as the initial phase for the first ROD.

Phase 2 would be constructed over time and as funding becomes available; this phase is described in **Chapter 5 – Phased Project Implementation** in concept. Phase 2 does not necessarily need to be selected in its entirety in subsequent RODs. This will be determined at the time of a subsequent ROD, considering available funding, transportation priorities at that time, and the results of any reevaluation that may be needed. Future funding availability will play a major role in determining when construction

begins and the priority and schedule under which the packages within each phase can be implemented.

Additional information regarding the funding process and phases of construction, including mitigation, is described in **Chapter 5 – Phased Project Implementation**.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES, AND MITIGATION

Detailed studies were conducted to determine the impacts of the project alternatives on different social, environmental, and economic resources, including:

- Transportation
- Historic Properties and Archeological Resources
- Parks and Recreation
- Right-of-Way and Relocations
- Noise
- Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice
- Wetlands
- Land Use
- Visual Resources
- Air Quality
- Hazardous Materials
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Sensitive Species
- Floodplains
- Water Quality
- Utilities
- Energy
- Noxious Weeds
- Paleontological Resources
- Soils and Geology
- Short-term Uses versus Long-term Productivity
- Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment to Resources
- Cumulative Impacts

Due to the similarities in their features, the impacts of the Existing I-25 Alternative and the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) are similar throughout much of the corridor. Both alternatives would impact wetlands, surface waters, floodplains, historic resources, and parks and recreational facilities. Both alternatives would include noise impacts on adjacent properties and handling of hazardous materials. In the Central Area (Phase 2) of the project, where the designs of the alternatives differ, the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) would impact a greater acreage of wetlands but would cause less overall harm to Section 4(f) properties. The Existing I-25 Alternative would provide fewer transportation and socioeconomic benefits because it provides less local connectivity.

Detailed information on the existing conditions in the corridor; effects of the project alternatives on the various social, environmental, and economic resources; and proposed mitigation strategies are included in **Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**. A complete listing of mitigation strategies is included in **Chapter 11 – Summary of Mitigation Commitments**. Per standard regulations, and in collaboration with permitting agencies and local jurisdictions, the CDOT Project Team designed the alternatives to limit environmental effects associated with the project. Steps in this process include:

- First, avoiding impacts to the extent possible through measures such as modifying the alignment to avoid sensitive resources.
- Second, minimizing impacts through measures such as increasing the span length between bridge columns to affect a smaller area of wetlands, parks, or sensitive habitat.
- Third, identifying appropriate mitigation measures to offset remaining project effects that cannot be avoided or minimized.

SECTION 4(f) EVALUATION

Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 declares that "it is the policy of the United States Government that special effort should be made to preserve the natural beauty of the countryside and public park and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges and historic sites" (49 United States Code [USC] 303). Section 4(f) is applicable to historic properties if those properties are eligible for listing or are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Build Alternatives are expected to require direct use of Section 4(f) resources. The Existing I-25 Alternative would result in the use of 35 Section 4(f) properties, including 3 historic districts (84 contributing properties), 28 individual historic properties, and 4 park and recreational resources. The Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) would result in the use of 39 Section 4(f) properties, including 4 historic districts (78 contributing properties), 30 individual historic properties, and 5 park and recreational resources.

If it is determined that there are no prudent and/or feasible alternatives that avoid all Section 4(f) properties, a least overall harm analysis is prepared. The least overall harm is determined by balancing a number of factors such as how the impacts can be mitigated, how much the property will still be harmed after mitigation, the views of the agencies with jurisdiction over the property, the degree to which the alternative meets the purpose and need for the project, the magnitude of impacts to other environmental resources, and cost. Based on the least harm analysis conducted in **Chapter 4 –Section 4(f) Evaluation**, the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) would cause the least overall harm to Section 4(f) resources. Under the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative), relative harm is greater for four properties for which there is a transportation use. This is compared to the Existing I-25 Alternative, where relative harm is greater for five properties for which there is a transportation use. The Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative) also better meets the project's Purpose and Need, allows for the replacement and expansion of Benedict Park, has fewer impacts to the Steelworks Suburbs Historic District, and is supported by local officials.

Avoidance alternatives, including bypasses, were considered, but none were feasible and prudent, as defined by Section 4(f). The evaluation presents strategies to avoid, minimize, or mitigate harm to affected properties such as Mineral Palace Park.

UPDATES TO THE FEIS

The following areas of the FEIS were updated following the release of the DEIS to update data with newly available information or to comply with new agency regulations:

- Historic Properties – A Programmatic Agreement (PA) has been developed by FHWA, CDOT, and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to outline mitigation for adverse effects to historic properties. **Section 3.2 Historic Properties** has been updated to reflect the mitigation measures included in the PA. The PA is included in **Appendix H**.
- Archaeological Resources – Following the publication of the DEIS, CDOT determined that 13 of the remaining "need data" archaeological sites had the potential to be impacted by either Build Alternative. Testing was conducted at 11 of these sites (access was denied by the property owners at the two remaining sites), which indicated that none of the 11 sites were eligible for nomination to the NRHP. **Section 3.2 Historic Properties** has been updated to include this information.
- Parks and Recreation – Coordination with the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) revealed that the project had the potential to impact three of the five Section 6(f)(3) assisted properties[1] in the corridor. As noted in **Section 3.6 Parks and Recreation**, the Existing I-25 Alternative would impact two Section 6(f)(3) assisted properties: Fountain Creek Park Land and Benedict Park. The Modified I-25 Alternative would impact three Section 6(f)(3) assisted properties: Fountain Creek Park Land, the Runyon/Fountain Lakes State Wildlife Area, and Benedict Park. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 requires that, prior to conversion of Section 6(f)(3) assisted property, the agency proposing the conversion must ensure that all practical alternatives to the conversion have been evaluated and rejected on a sound basis. Where no practical alternative to a conversion exists, the LWCF Act requires that replacement property of reasonably equivalent usefulness, monetary value and location be acquired for those lands to be converted. **Section 3.6 Parks and Recreation** has been updated to document the proposed conversion of the three Section 6(f)(3) assisted properties and coordination with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).
- Noise – The project's noise analysis was revised to comply with updated noise regulations (*Highway Traffic Noise: Analysis and Abatement Guidance* [FHWA, 2011], and the *CDOT Noise Analysis and Abatement Guidelines* [CDOT, 20011a]). The revised noise analysis used the FHWA-approved computer model *Traffic Noise Model 2.5* (TNM 2.5) to predict existing and future noise levels, replacing the *Stamina 2.0* software. The computer model predicted additional impacts at a few locations previously predicted to not have impacts. This is a reflection of the differences between computer models rather than a change in traffic or roadway conditions. **Section 3.5 Noise** has been updated to reflect the results of the new impact analysis and mitigation recommendations.

[1] Section 6(f)(3) assisted properties include parks and recreational facilities that have been acquired through the use of grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965. Section 6(f) of the LWCF Act ensures that federal investments in the LWCF are maintained for public outdoor recreational use.

- Hazardous Materials – Following the publication of the DEIS, the Phase I Initial Site Assessment (ISA), originally prepared in 2004, was updated to comply with *American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) E 1527-05, A Standard Practice for Environmental Site Assessments: Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Process*. **Section 3.11 Hazardous Materials** has been updated to reflect the results of the Phase I ISA.
- Project Phasing – The PACOG is preparing an amendment to the Fiscally Constrained Plan in the *Pueblo Area 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan* to be completed prior to the Phase 1 ROD that will identify between $300 and $315 million for New Pueblo Freeway project improvements. This amount of funding would allow CDOT to construct in Phase 1 the improvements planned from approximately the Ilex interchange north to 29th Street and connecting the I-25 main line improvements to those previously completed just north of 29th Street. The expanded Phase 1 would address many of the existing geometric deficiencies and roadway segments with poor accident ratings and would provide additional roadway capacity along the sections of I-25 with the most congestion, as identified in the project Purpose and Need.

  The Indiana Avenue and Northern Bridge Replacement packages were removed from Phase 1 of the project because the funds available through CDOT's Bridge Enterprise(funded by State Bill [SB] 09-108 FASTER legislation) for these projects limited to bridge rehabilitation for these structures, and does not accommodate total bridge replacement as proposed in the Modified I-25 Alternative (Preferred Alternative). Replacement of the Indiana Avenue and Northern Avenue bridges would occur in Phase 2. **Chapter 5 – Phased Project Implementation** has been updated to reflect this change.
- Public and Agency Comments – Comments received during the 45-day public and agency review period are included and addressed in the FEIS. Many of the comments received require an explanation, clarification, or factual correction. Some of the comments resulted in a change to the FEIS. **Chapter 6 – Comments and Coordination** provides a summary of the comments received, and **Appendix G** contains a complete accounting of comments received during the comment period and CDOT's and FHWA's responses to those comments.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Early and ongoing public and agency involvement occurred throughout this project. The goal of the Context Sensitive Solutions process was to provide opportunities for meaningful participation in the decision process beginning with problem definition, continuing through development of alternative solutions and evaluation and screening of alternatives, and ending with identification of the Preferred Alternative for implementation. The process was designed to solicit information, ideas, and opinions from the public and agencies interested in the New Pueblo Freeway project. CDOT will continue to conduct public involvement efforts throughout the life of the project through final construction.

Four leadership teams and associated committees—the Project Leadership Team (PLT), the Technical Leadership Team (TLT), the Community Working Groups (CWG), and the Park Advisory Committee (PAC)—were organized and managed by CDOT to provide data and input to FHWA in four different aspects of project development: public policy, planning and engineering, community values, and City parks. Throughout the project, individual teams met at regular intervals and as events warranted. The leadership teams provided multi-disciplinary input based on their individual areas of expertise and reviews throughout the life of the project, while the committees provided the CDOT Project Team with insights into community issues on an as-needed basis.

From 2000 to 2011, the following public meetings and outreach methods were implemented for the New Pueblo Freeway project:

- 10 Open Houses
- 1 Public Hearing
- 4 Community Workshops
- 15 Community Working Group Meetings
- 23 Neighborhood Workshops
- 6 Business Group Meetings
- 3 Individual Home and Business Owner Meetings
- 3 Local Agency Meetings
- 2 Business Workshops
- 1 Business Meeting
- 1 Neighborhood Event
- 2 Issue-Focused Meetings
- 7 Park Advisory Committee Meetings
- 1 Door-to-Door Event

- A Telephone Hotline
- A Project Website
- Brochures and Flyers
- Newspaper Coverage and Public Notices
- Television and Radio Coverage

More information regarding public outreach efforts for the New Pueblo Freeway project is presented in **Chapter 6 – Comments and Coordination**.

Publication of the DEIS

The DEIS was released in November 2011 for public and agency review and comment. The public was notified of the release of the DEIS and the public hearings through local newspaper announcements, postal notices, and the project website (www.i25pueblo.com). Copies of the DEIS were made available at 15 locations in addition to the project website. During the 45-day comment period, FHWA and CDOT received a total of 64 comments. These comments were received at the public hearing (held December 8, 2011), mailed directly to CDOT, or submitted via the project website. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, City of Pueblo Historic Preservation Commission, CPW, St. Charles Mesa Water District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Department of the Interior also submitted comments to the lead agencies. Two petitions were also submitted: 49 individuals signed the Eiler's Heights petition, and 252 individuals signed the St. Mary petition. Each of these petitions expressed concerns about impacts to the properties surrounding Mesa Avenue.

Many of the comments received require an explanation, clarification, or factual correction. Some comments resulted in a change to the FEIS. These changes, if applicable, are noted in the comment responses. The comments received were mixed in support and criticism of the details of the DEIS and identification of the Modified I-25 Alternative as the Preferred Alternative. More than half of the comments remarked on the specific elements of the DEIS analysis and the impacts in the corridor. Fourteen of the comments were specifically related to right of way and relocation of properties. **Appendix G** contains a complete accounting of comments received during the comment period and CDOT's and FHWA's responses to those comments.

NEXT STEPS IN THE NEPA PROCESS

This FEIS has been prepared in compliance with FHWA regulations found at 23 CFR 771 and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508. This FEIS is available to interested parties for review and comment for 30 days. During the review period, a public hearing will be held and all comments will be recorded.

The next step in the NEPA process following the FEIS review period is preparation of a ROD, which will document the federal agency decision for the project.